DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 184 678 PS 011 317

AUTHOR Ritter, Virginia F.; Ritter, John M.
TITLE All Children Are Gifted....
PUB DATE [79]
NOTE 18p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Educational Change; *Educational Objectives; Elementary Secondary Education; *Gifted; *Individualized Instruction; *Individualized Reading; *Inquiry; Learning Activities; *Open Education; Teacher Characteristics; *Teaching Methods

ABSTRACT

All students are gifted in some special way. Today's classrooms must be individualized so well that, as teachers, we really know our students and their most effective patterns of learning, realizing that cognitive and affective learning are equally important. If individual children are to approach their potential in giftedness, in whatever area, they must be allowed and encouraged to pursue topics of vital concern to them personally. A classroom open to real learning must include a wide variety of opportunities for children to express themselves in all areas and in an environment in which they can take risks, knowing that their efforts are respected and valued. Gifted students should be allowed to select the books they read and be given the chance to spontaneously discuss what they have read. All learning is the result of inquiry or some related inquiries that provide answers to questions. Alert teachers will introduce inductive and deductive modes of problem solving in daily activities in each subject area, seek out the general and special needs of learners and suggest inquiry models for each need. Teachers for the gifted should understand and employ new techniques based on inferential intuitive processes, values and needs as motivating essentials, conceptualization, hypotheses, perceptual cues, classification and discrimination. We are in dire need of an overhaul of our educational objectives and structures. Schools should be opened so that seekers of all kinds of knowledge may benefit from the educational setting. (Author/RH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED184678 :

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

All Children Are Gifted....

Virginia F. Ritter and John M. Ritter
Department of Curriculum and Instruction
University of Northern Iowa
Cedar Falls, Iowa 50613

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

John M. Ritter

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

PS011317

All children are gifted! Each child's talents are different from those of all others. Children may inherit talent from relatives now living as well as from those relatives who lived thousands of years ago. Thus, each child carries his own complex heritage. Each child's talents also may be affected by the opportunities in his environment.

Albert Einstein, the celebrated physicist, was a gifted person but he did not adjust well in all learning areas. His thoughts carried him far into our universe, allowing him to solve numerous problems that eluded other physicists. But some of his teachers found him to be a slow learner even when he was confronted with relatively easy tasks. What might he have contributed to the school environment if his talents had been recognized and respected?

As a teacher observes and listens to the children in the classroom, he/she realizes that each child in the room is truly gifted. The gift may be a smile that lights up the whole room; a gift of verbal expression which in our push for "quietness" may be squelched; an imaginative mind which dares to dream; a peace-making attitude which brings about more understanding among his peers; or an enthusiasm for living which may transcend even the moodiest classmate.

However, in our current quest for specialization, we look for ways of narrowing the field to classifications such as geniuses. But what is a genius? It may be someone who can walk through the woods and hear sounds of nature that no one else can hear. He may then be able to express what he hears in such a way that even the tired

businessman may share this experience through prose, poetry, music or painting. He may be able to find ways to solve our energy problems or bring about peaceful solutions to world problems.

Is a genius a person who scores regularly at the top or within the highest percentile on a battery of validated intelligence tests? There are very few such persons. Even if there were, many probably would not be socially as useful as highly rated specialists often are. Many who succeed in the arts, sciences, or technologies which require a high level of creativity, are considered to be geniuses although they may have only one string for their bows to perform on. Those who are truly geniuses, as defined, often are creative but lonely.

In fact, high scores on intelligence tests may be a handicap for many. If the child is a rapid problem solver, he may have few friend; others may be embarrassed by his lightning-like performance. He may prefer to play difficult mental games rather than do the work-sheets assigned to the entire class. Or he may even demonstrate that he can answer difficult problems more rapidly than his teacher can.

But most children have mixed abilities, both physical and mental. Many may be slow, but anxious to learn. Children who apply their talents diligently may achieve educational goals beyond those who may have more measured talent.

It is best to assume that <u>all</u> students are gifted in some <u>special</u> way. The teacher must meet the learner on his special territory and the prospective learner must feel that a satisfactory and pleasant congruence has occurred. Generally the meetings of teachers and prospective learners are most happily together and ready for the

learning to begin if they meet on the pupils' turf. In this mode, both are likely to be pleased that each has given a little to the other. For both, the light has begun to shine.

During the early years in school, each child must build a structure of processes which allow him to live and grow within the learning environment that surrounds him. In the self-structured and very personal environment, he is able to develop a self-concept which somehow allows him to perceive the changed environment and adjust to the new and more complex setting. The old concept will not do if he is to reach his potential.

Individualizing for Identification of the Gifted

There are thirty children in a classroom, all with different talents. The entire group is assigned a lesson in a textbook, possibly a reader. The teacher introduces the ten new words to the class. At least, these words are supposed to be new to "sixth graders!" After a set length of time, there is a general discussion of the content of the story and the usual six or so children respond, perhaps in a superficial manner. Is the teacher then able to evaluate the learning of the class and make judgments about their progress? Is it easy, or even possible to identify the unique gifts of all the children in this setting?

Of course it isn't! Each child has secrets within him that he feeds every day. Something excites him on the way to school; a squirrel dashes across in front of the bus and arrives safely. One of his secrets may be that he loves animals and their ways of living. If the particular story read has been about an animal family, he

would have been filled to the brim with anecdotes based on his experiences in the park or during the past vacation. Would the teacher have learned more about the child if she had allowed him, even encouraged him, to read from a book of his choosing? Is it really necessary for every child to do the same assignment?

Will a variety of standardized tests which are designed to show progress or failure in relation to a generalized body of knowledge give the teacher an accurate determination of giftedness throughout a class of thirty? Will it measure creativity, sensitivity, and humaneness which could possibly be the greatest gifts in a time when the projected needs for specified cognitive content are so undetermined? Never before has there been such a need to guide children beyond mere memorization and comprehension to synthesis and evaluation, described in Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives.[1] Today's classroom must be individualized so well that, as teachers, we really know our students and their most effective patterns of learning, realizing that cognitive and affective learning are equally important.

Strategies for Opening the Classroom for the Gifted

The most important strategy is respect for learning and growing. This requires an openness on the part of the teacher to new ideas and divergent behaviors. It necessitates that a teacher's role be one of guidance, acceptance, and inquiry right along with the students.

> The instructor should emulate Socrates and teach in the hypothetical mode so that he and the student might coexist in a more cooperative position with respect to the transmission and discovery of knowledge. And the student should be encouraged to work things out for himself, to organize evidence so that he is able to go beyond it to novel conjectures and insights, and to participate in an active dialogue with his teacher.[2]

This can apply to the kindergarten child who rolls his toy cars down an inclined plane as well as to the sixth grader who tries a more advanced experiment in physics. The task of the teacher is to guide the learner in a way that acknowledges Piaget's stages of intellectual development (pre-operational, concrete operational, or formal thought).

Underlying this openness in Bruner's famous hypothesis that "any subject can be taught effectively in some intellectually honest form to any child at any stage of development."[3] If a child is to approach his potential in giftedness, in whatever area, he must be allowed and encouraged to pursue topics of vital concern to him personally. This would assure his active participation and a cooperative hypothetical mode between the teacher and student.

> The individual is best viewed neither as a passive recipient of information nor as a bundle of stimulus-response connections. Rather he should be regarded as an active participant in the knowledge getting process, one who selects and transforms information, who constructs hypotheses and who alters those hypotheses in the face of inconsistent or discrepant evidence.[4]

For example, the kindergartener may alter the incline of the plane to see if the cars will go down more rapidly or the sixth grader may need to do additional reading on the distribution of molecules.

The key to all this for the classroom teacher is, in addition to openness, a spirit of inquiry and an intellectually stimulating classroom environment. How does a teacher do this with a class of thirty students? Simply by recognizing that the room is filled with teachers! As students inquire and hypothesize, they begin to learn that they have a lot to share and even more to learn. The teacher's job almost becomes one of getting out of the way and letting them learn.

Individualized reading will become a focal point, along with pupil-teacher conferences, at all times of the day and at various places in the room, even extending to the library. More money will need to be spent on trade books and less on worksheets, because full-class assignments will be almost non-existent.

Of course there will be overall themes, at times, to which all class members will respond, but in their own individual ways and with the results that the uniqueness of each person will be respected and recognized.

Opportunities for Expression

Why some bright youngsters do poorly in school is a question of great concern because we want each child to develop to his maximum ability. Much evidence points to the belief that there is a relationship between positive self-concept and high achievement and negative self-concept and underachievement. The determining factor seems to depend upon how the child perceives that significant others view him.

A classroom open to real learning must include a wide variety of opportunities for children to express themselves in all areas and in an environment in which they can take risks, knowing that their efforts are respected and valued. There is not pressure to compete with others but rather to grow and develop to his own fullest measure.

Areas in which each child must have opportunities for expression are:[5]

1. Physical well-being (athletic ability, physical energy, and physical health);
2. Scholarship (mathematical ability, scholarship, scientific ability, and self-confidence-intellectual);
3. Estheticism (originality, artistic ability, speaking ability, writing ability, expressiveness, and acting ability);

4. Pragmatism (self-control, independence, conservatism, practical mindedness, and perseverance);
5. Technical-scientific ability (mechanical ability, artistic ability, scientific ability, and research ability);
6. Sociability (leadership, popularity with opposite sex, sociability, aggressiveness, cheerfulness, self-confidence, popularity);
7. Sensitivity to others (understanding of others, sensitivity to the needs of others, cheerfulness, and sense of humor).

We need to guide each child in the classroom to use his talents fully so that he will be productive for himself as well as for society.

It is significant that Bruner and his collaborators chose to call their summary statements of belief, Beyond the Information Given because a person who has learned to perceive with clarity, thoughtfulness, and inquiry will not only achieve the knowledge he desires or needs, but will usually go far beyond what he might have hoped from the information given only. This is an element of learning that is creative in nature.

Reading Appropriate for Gifted Individuals

If we value individuals enough to treat each person as a gifted individual, then we must value the person's right to make judgments. This would apply especially to the opportunity and/or responsibility to make decisions about reading materials. Is it fair for teachers to assume that students will learn only if they read prescribed materials with accompanying workbooks and tests?

Learning is exciting and challenging and most students want to learn, but it is indeed an individual matter and cannot be standardized to the point that one size (or series) fits all. Rather it is essential that each student be given the privilege or responsibility to pursue interests and needs that are uniquely his.

So, what readings <u>are</u> appropriate for gifted individuals? Simply, whatever they choose, accompanied by continuous sharing with the teacher, parents, principals, aides, and classmates. Motivation and evaluation are built-in factors when the students know that their choices are valued to this extent. An extra benefit is the resulting attitude that reading is enjoyable, purposeful, and an important part of life now as well as in the future.

But how can you do this when you have thirty students in your classroom? How will the administrators, parents, and next year's teachers feel about this? If we do our job well, the reception of the progress of these students is one of pleasure and eagerness to help them continue this excitement in learning. But it is not an easy task!

The first criterion is a teacher who is excited about reading, learning, and teaching. He/she must be confident that children can make important decisions and that they will want to share. The teacher must provide a responsibe classroom environment with inviting physical arrangements, such as carpeted areas, pillowed corners, bathtubs, specially decorated areas, and enough large blocks of time for reading and sharing.

The supply of books must be very large. The sources will need to be as wide and varied as humanly possible and this supply must change often. Of course, students must be consulted about the topics of books to be selected. Often they may be the ones to go on the selection trip.

In the classroom, each student understands that he is responsible for selecting and reading a book of his choice. The teacher is not

sitting idly by; she is interacting, questioning, making suggestions, and listening to the discussions among the children who are reading on similar topics. He/she is having a conference with each student at least two times a week. This conference is the heart of the whole process. Here the teacher finds out about the "giftedness" of each student, his real interests, his concerns, strengths, and his weaknesses. From these cues he/she can help the student build effectively toward life-long reading and learning.

But what about skills? That's the really exciting part! The teacher does not put every child through a training session on skills he already knows; rather there are individual or small-group temporary sessions on skills that are needed, as identified in the individual conferences. Time is not wasted on the teaching of skills already learned but rather active acquisition of skills needed.

Real learning comes alive if the teacher truly respects the developmental level of students and their right to make decisions and judgments about their own learning. What better motivation for life-long learning could there possibly be? And what better way could there be to identify and foster the "giftedness" of each individual in the classroom?

Inquiry Activities for the Gifted

Because we assume that all children are gifted, and that all mental and physical qualities can be modulated to be useful in the learning process, we are pressed to assume that there are suitable inquiry designs or patterns enough to go around in every school environment. In fact, most learners will find a variety of inquiry activites at every achievement level of inquiring and if both teacher

and students cooperate, there will be readiness activities leading to successful problem solving. The trick is to make readiness a part of the inquiry project. As the inquiry project calls for higher levels of readiness elements, the net result may be higher level problem solutions.

Let us suppose there is a painting hanging in the room. The learners are making individual judgments about the artist's purposes. Their actions are analyses reflecting their readiness for artistic criticism. The predominating colors are orange, brown, gray, red, blue, and green. It is a mountain scene at the end of summer. Some responses from the students may be, "May we try to paint a picture? How does the painter make his colors? Is the scene from a real place? Are these stories about the people who once lived in places like these?"

The alert teacher will introduce methods of problem solving. Both the inductive and the deductive modes of problem solving will be used in the daily activities in each subject area.

All learning is the result of an inquiry or some related inquiries. A classroom filled with children may wish to publish a newspaper. Together they decide what kinds of news they wish to publish and how frequently they wish to publish. They appoint or elect an editor, a number of reporters, and columnists. They make decisions about who will seek out news items about athletics, drama, announcements of interest to all, schedules and other information from the principal's office. Reporters will keep in touch with their special news sources daily. How will the copy be reproduced and where will the funds come from? More questions like these will arise daily until the staff learns best how to do its job. The science

reporter stops by the laboratories and engages in conversation that reveals what experiments are in progress, or have been completed. Another reporter will get the information about an air flight over the city and how learners were able to identify landmarks on the ground. The librarian has a list of new books available for those with common interests.

All learning springs from inquiries that provide answers to questions. Alert teachers will seek out the general and special needs of the learners and will suggest inquiry models for each need.

Teachers for the Gifted

Education is changing so rapidly that the elders of our society frequently do not recognize the newer terms, methods or even goals which pass as schooling. Stimulus and response patterns are no longer acceptable concepts in a definition of the learning process. Knowledge is more than the remembering of the high points of yesterday's lecture. Students are no longer expected to be passive listeners. Instead, they are better described when functioning in the Socratic mode.

Teachers of the gifted must know how to use the new tools for learning and teaching. Examples of these are access to recent theories and processes; the magnitude of research and writing; and the easy access that learners have to new and relevant research.

All teachers must realize that teachers and learners must use tested inquiry procedures as they create new conceptions from the mass of information that results from tested patterns of thinking and intellectual growth within and affected by modern social patterns which tend to allow all learners to be more efficient in the acquisition of knowledge and concept structuring, as Piaget and Bruner agree, often beyond the information given.

Any teachers who aspire to create the needed concepts for modern learning styles must also relate to the student as an equal, and to function as equals as they create new knowledge with our new tools. These new tools are perception, an inferential intuitive process; values and needs as motivating essentials; conceptualization; hypotheses; perceptual cues that help expand understanding; classification essential to thinking and knowing; and differential discrimination, which describes how things differ from one another.

Inherent in every classroom, in every activity, would be the use of these tools whether it be in creative writing, problem solving, predicting future events, perceiving new ideas or structures, classifying and making value judgments about every-day events.

The Gifted -- Our Leaders of Tomorrow

> The principal goal of education is to create men who are capable of doing new things, not simply of repeating what generations have done--men who are creative, inventive, and discoverers. The second goal of education is to form minds which can be critical, can verify, and not accept everything they are offered. The great danger today is of slogans, collective opinions, ready-made trends of thought. We have to be able to resist individually, to criticize, to distinguish between what is proven and what is not. So we need pupils who are active, who learn early to find out by themselves, partly by their own spontaneous activity and partly through material we select for them; who learn early to tell what is verifiable and what is simply the first idea that comes to them.[6]

As we learn more and more about our universe, as we create technologies that structure new models for our living and working environments; and as our world grows smaller, we are slowly becoming aware that we are in dire need of an overhaul of our educational objectives and structures. No longer can we sustain our nation and know so little about the remainder of the earth and its inhabitants. Even our universe, as we know it, is speedily changing in ways that

we do not understand. The old "read and recite" model for schools has long ago failed us and is now useful only in limited ways. The textbook is frequently too soon out of date.

We need to go into the world to learn. We need to meet and co-operate with all the peoples of the world for understanding. We must make friends of those who are foreign to most of us. We need to open our schools so that seekers of all kinds of knowledge may learn and benefit from the educational setting, we must be free to go out to investigate our natural environment, and we must recognize that each learner is talented in special and unique ways!

Let <u>all</u> of their lights shine throughout the universe!

Footnotes

[1]Benjamin S. Bloom, Editor, Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, The Classification of Educational Goals, Handbook I: Cognitive Domain (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1965).

[2]Jerome S. Bruner, Beyond the Information Given (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1973), p. 397-8.

[3]Ibid., p. 378.

[4]Ibid., p. 379.

[5]Ira J. Gordon, Human Development, A Transactional Perspective (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), p. 388.

[6]Richard E. Ripple and Verne N. Rockcastle, Editors, Piaget Rediscovered (New York: School of Education Cornell, 1968), p. 5.

References

Bloom, Benjamin S., Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, The Classification of Educational Goals, Handbook I: Cognitive Domain. New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1965.

Bruner, Jerome S., Beyond the Information Given. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1973.

Elkind, David., Children and Adolescents. New York: Oxford University Press, 1974.

Gordon, Ira J., Human Development, A Transactional Perspective. New York: Harper & Row, 1975.

Hendrick, Joanne., The Whole Child. St. Louis: The C.V. Mosby Company, 1980.

Lindbert, Lucile and Swedlow, Rita., Early Childhood Education, A Guide for Observation and Participation, Second Edition. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1980.

Ripple, Richard, E. and Rockcastle, Verne N., Editors, Piaget Rediscovered. New York: School of Education Cornell, 1968.

Some Suggested Books For Students

Ames, Lee J., Draw 50 Dinosaurs and Other Prehistoric Animals. New York: Doubleday & Company, 1977.

Ames, Lee J., Draw 50 Airplanes, Aircraft and Spacecraft. New York: Doubleday & Company, 1977.

Andrist, Ralph K., Heroes of Polar Exploration. New York: American Heritage Publishing Company, 1962.

Some Suggested Books For Students (Continued)

Becker, Joyce, Jewish Holiday Crafts. New York: Bonim Books, 1977.

Boyd, Mildred, The Silent Cities, Civilization Lost and Found. New York: Criterion Books, 1966.

Commins, Dorothy Berliner, All About the Symphony Orchestra. New York: Random House, 1961.

Cottrell, Leonard., Digs and Diggers, A Book of World Archaeology. New York: Doubleday & Company, 1977.

Cottrell, Leonard, Crete: Island of Mystery. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1965.

Foreman, Michael, War and Peas. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1974.

Friedman, Joy Troth, What's So Important About ... New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1972.

Gallant, Roy A., Exploring the Universe. New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1956.

Gallant, Roy A., Exploring the Planets. New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1967.

Gettings, Fred, The Meaning and Wonder of Art. New York: Golden Press, 1963.

Glubok, Shirley, Editor, Discovering Tut-ankh-Aments Tomb. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1968.

Goode, Ruth, People of the First Cities. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1977.

Green, Norma, The Hole in the Dike. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1974.

Hyde, Margaret O., Exploring Earth and Space. New York: McGraw Hill, 1967.

Isadora, Rachel, Ben's Trumpet. New York: Greenwillow Books, 1979.

Iverson, Genie, I Want To Be Big. New York: E.P. Dutton, 1979.

Janosh, Dear Snowman. New York: The World Publishing Company, 1969.

Kreischer, Louis, String Art. New York: Crown Publishers, 1976.

Krieger, David L., Letters and Words. New York: Young Scott Books, 1969.

May, Julian, Before the Indians, New York: Holiday House, 1969.

Some Suggested Books for Students (Continued)

Savitz, Harriet May, Wheelchair Champions, A History of Wheelchair Champions. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1978.

Weisgard, Leonard, The First Farmers in The New Stone Age. New York: Coward-McCann, 1966.

Weiss, Harvey, Games & Puzzles You Can Make Yourself. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1976.